

CIAntics

Anyone who has ever worked as a foreign correspondent is familiar with the type. He lives permanently in a remote capital, say, Vientiane or Lagos or Baghdad, as the free-lance representative for an obscure US publication or as occasional "stringer" for one of the better-known American newspapers, news magazines or wire services. His means of support are dubious, yet he has a comfortable apartment, a car and an expense account that permits him to pay for rounds of drinks. His relations with the US diplomatic mission and with certain members of the local government are excellent and, although he rarely comes up with scoops, he chases down the news in times of crisis with the dedication of a cub reporter. Speculating on the motives behind his residence in this faraway place, his more established colleagues usually offer the guess that he works at least part-time for the Central Intelligence Agency. Now, it turns out, their guess is probably correct.

The *Washington Star-News* has disclosed that some 40 US journalists abroad are regular undercover agents for the CIA and that William E. Colby, the agency director, intends to keep most of them on the payroll while dismissing a few whose continued clandestine activities, the newspaper said, "could most seriously compromise the integrity of the American press." Those to be fired are a small number of staff correspondents with general circulation news organizations. Those to be retained, according to the *Star-News*, are the "stringers" and itinerant authors as well as writers for trade journals and specialized newsletters, most of whom operate for the CIA with the approval of their employers.

Like Rep. Lucien Nedzi of Michigan, chairman of one of the four congressional committees that is supposed to keep watch on the CIA, we are not "really surprised" by this revelation. It was known years ago, for instance, that CIA was financing *Encounter*, a political and literary monthly published in London. But we cannot agree with Nedzi's comment that it is nothing more than "an arrangement for gathering of intelligence" and, as such, "difficult to see much wrong with it." News dispatches from the Congo or Indonesia or Paraguay ought to be as unbiased and independent as those from Paris or Bonn. They are not likely to be as long as reporters are enrolled in the CIA or in any other organization that has an investment in tilting information. Looking back on some of the accounts from Vietnam in the early days of the war leads one to wonder whether more than a few journalists there at the time were quite deliberately putting out a line the CIA wanted to propagate. All journalists, part-time or full-fledged, should be removed from the CIA. There are two ways that can be done.

First, the media ought to screen their own personnel rigorously and eliminate anyone officially connected with the agency. This is often not done because wire services, newspapers, news magazines and television networks frequently are desperate to have a man in some out-of-the-way spot and are lax about checking his credentials. Secondly, the congressional oversight committees ought to examine the link between the CIA and the press just as, some years ago, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee looked into the army of US public relations companies covertly representing foreign governments at home and abroad. This would, of course, require the oversight committees to take a more scrutinizing attitude toward the CIA than they have to date.

And while they are at it, the congressional oversight committees should investigate possible ties between the CIA and private arms merchants. The biggest of these, Samuel Cummings, is a former CIA employee who lives in Monte Carlo, where he holds citizenship. He runs a firm called Interarmco, which sells weapons ranging from pistols to jet aircraft. There is reason to believe that his company was set up under CIA auspices in order to carry out special agency operations. One such operation would be the transfer of arms to countries prevented by embargoes from officially receiving US weapons. Thus, for example, Cummings could purchase arms originally supplied by the US to Turkey and ship them to Pakistan. Congressional sources submit that he serves the CIA by acting as the cover for weapons movements to many covert groups supported by the agency.